

## Believers are New Creations in Christ; The Ministry of Reconciliation 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

*2 Corinthians 5:14-21: For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. 16 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

### Background Notes

In the first part of the chapter, the great and awesome truths of the resurrection of our bodies and our appearance before the judgment seat of Christ are presented. At the Rapture, believers who have died in Christ will be resurrected, and Christians living at that time will have their bodies transformed.

The “judgment seat” of Christ follows some time after the Rapture, and thus all Christians will be in their resurrected bodies. In other words, we will literally see the Lord face to face when we stand before Him at the judgment seat. “Face to face” is not a figurative expression when it comes to being with the Lord. I’m so glad that we’ll be in our resurrected bodies when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, aren’t you? I can’t imagine having to stand before our glorified Lord in our present imperfect state.

In communicating all these great truths to the Corinthian believers, Paul said that it might appear that he was out of his mind, or a fanatic - a fanatic in a good sense! The same will be true of us when we realize the importance of these truths and the great need to communicate them.

In verse 14 Paul said that it is the love of Christ that compels us. “The love of Christ” – does this mean Christ’s love for us or our love for Christ? Most likely it means Christ’s love for us. When we realize how much Jesus Christ loved us, we should be motivated to be more faithful and committed to serving the Lord without shame - even to the point of being called fanatics.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Believers are new creations in Christ.

Verse 17, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”*

Some translations have “new creature,” which may be misleading. A better translation is “**new creation**,” and this is actually a more literal translation from the Greek language. When a person becomes a Christian, there is more to the package of salvation than just forgiveness of sins and so-called fire insurance. That would certainly be good enough, but there is more - *much more!*

First of all, we have a **new position in Christ**. When Jesus died on the cross, He died on behalf of all people, because all are sinners and Jesus died for the sins of the world (v14). Does that mean that everyone is saved? No, only those who believe are saved. Notice verse 15: *“He died that those who live [those who have believed] should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and rose again.”*

So when we become believers, God sees us as having died with Christ, and as having risen with Christ. We are now **in Christ**. That is our position. And everyone is either saved and in Christ, or lost and outside of Christ. There is no middle position. That is how we should look at everyone around us: are they in Christ or outside of Christ?

*“From now on, we regard no one according to the flesh”(v16).* No longer should we view people in the old way – the way the world regards people. Worldly thinking wants to know: How much money do they have? What connections do they have? What heritage or education do they have? What social status do they have? Now our new “bottom line” is: are they saved or lost? Are they in Christ or outside of Christ?

At the end of verse 16 Paul said, *“Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.”* He meant that once, before our salvation, we only knew about Jesus as a good man. That’s the attitude of many people today. But now as believers, we know Christ as the Lord of glory!

Besides our new position in Christ, we also have **new life in Christ**. When we believe in Him, we are born again. We are regenerated with *divine* life! Believers participate in the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). So for the believer in Christ, with divine life, things are now completely different. The old has passed, the new has come - and the basis of the change is not some kind of rehabilitation or re-education. Believers are **new creations** in Christ.

### 2. Believers have the ministry of reconciliation.

Verses 18-21, *“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to*

*them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*

Reconciliation means "to restore to a state of friendship and harmony." Because of sin we were alienated from God, but in Christ we are reconciled to God. The world thinks of reconciliation as a two-way street. In marriage counseling, "he gives a little and she gives a little," and the estranged couple is reconciled. However, between God and us, it is a *one-way* street: **God reconciles us to Himself.** "*God has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ ... God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.*" God has done all the work. All a person has to do is believe.

When verse 21 says that God made Christ "to be sin," that doesn't mean that somehow Christ intrinsically became sin. No, it means that when Christ died on the cross as our substitute, God judged Him as if He were a sinner like us. Why? So we could "*become the righteousness of God in Him.*" God now sees us as righteous because we are in Christ. He sees us as righteous as our Lord Jesus Christ, because the righteousness of Christ has been transferred to us as our sin was transferred to Him. What an amazing truth!

And now we have a ministry of reconciliation. We are like ambassadors from Heaven to this world that is alienated from God. Our message to the people of this world is that God loves you! In spite of your sin and alienation from God, He wants to reconcile you to Himself. He's made it possible for complete and wonderful harmony to be restored because of what Jesus Christ has done for you. This is our message and ministry. Believers have the ministry of reconciliation.

## **Practical Application**

### **1. Let's be good ambassadors for Christ!**

Ambassadors are the official representatives of their home countries and governments to foreign countries where they are sent. Good ambassadors represent their home countries properly. Good ambassadors do not bring disgrace on their home country by shameful activities. Good ambassadors don't misrepresent the official positions and policies of their home country. Good ambassadors communicate the desires of their home country.

As Christians, we are ambassadors for the kingdom of God. What kind of ambassadors are we? Are we good ambassadors - or are we ambassadors who have to be recalled? Do we represent our king and the kingdom properly? Are we careful not to bring disgrace on the home country by shameful behavior? Are we diligently communicating the official message of our king to this foreign world? "Be reconciled to God!" is our official message. That's our commission. Let's be good ambassadors for Christ!

## **2. Don't determine doctrine from biblical illustrations.**

"Don't determine doctrine from biblical illustration" is a principle of "biblical hermeneutics" – a principle for properly

interpreting scripture. Here are two examples of using illustrations to create a doctrine – and both are ***bad hermeneutics!***

**Example #1:** In 1 Corinthians 15:51-57, the doctrine of the Rapture of the Church is taught. Verse 52 says that the Rapture will occur "*at the last trumpet.*" Here Paul was using an *illustration*. In that day, military troops were called together and then moved out in formation by means of a specific series of trumpet calls. The last trumpet call was the signal for the troops that had been rallied to move out. Paul used the final trumpet call as an illustration of all true believers rallied together and moving out to Heaven at the Rapture - at the "last trumpet." Thus the last trumpet is used here as an *illustration*.

In the book of Revelation, several judgments are mentioned: the Seal judgments, the Trumpet judgments and the Bowl judgments (chapter 6-16). The seals and trumpets and bowls are *symbols* of three series of judgments during the future Tribulation period. The seventh or last trumpet judgment falls somewhere in the middle of the Tribulation period.

Some believers have equated the "last trumpet" of 1 Corinthians 15 with the "last trumpet" (or seventh trumpet) of Revelation, and created a doctrine that says the Rapture will occur during the Tribulation period. This is *bad hermeneutics!* These trumpets are ***illustrations***. To build a doctrine that the Rapture of the Church will occur during the middle of the Tribulation by equating the trumpet illustration and the trumpet symbol is hermeneutically way off base.

**Don't determine doctrine from biblical illustrations!**

**Example #2:** How does using illustration to determine doctrine relate to 2 Corinthians 5? Verse 20 says, "*Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ.*" And Philippians 3:20 says, "*For our citizenship is in heaven.*" So these two Scriptures teach that our citizenship is in heaven and we are ambassadors on this earth.

From these Scriptures, I've heard Christians wrongly reason this way: Do ambassadors vote in the foreign country where they are ambassadors? No, they vote in their home country. Do ambassadors pay income taxes to the foreign country where they are ambassadors? Again, no - they pay taxes to their home country, where they are citizens. From this a doctrine is built: since we are citizens of Heaven and only ambassadors here on this earth, Christians shouldn't vote - and Christians shouldn't pay income taxes.

Is this good hermeneutics or bad hermeneutics? This is ***bad hermeneutics!*** It's bad hermeneutics, because these Christians are determining their doctrine from biblical illustrations. Being citizens of heaven and being ambassadors to this earth are simply illustrations! **Don't determine doctrine from biblical illustrations!**